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# The Turkey Red Special

Railroad line tied the Gallatin Valley together for crops, travel

Editor's note: If you're like us, you are probably weary of the election, so here's a historical piece about our great area.

BY DENNIS GAUB • STAFF WRITER

Margaret Gee grew up on Reese Creek northeast of Belgrade more than a century ago, before the U.S. entered World War I and decades before an easy drive along paved roads brought rural Gallatin County residents into Belgrade and Bozeman.

Mrs. Gee said she and other children in the area seldom went anywhere. A trip to Belgrade, where her grandparents had moved, meant staying overnight. Reese Creek youngsters got to Bozeman infrequently for an overnight visit.

Still, an alternative existed to riding a horse-drawn wagon into Bozeman or maybe even traveling in a Model T on narrow, rutted gravel paths that passed for roads then.

Oh, yes, the Turkey Red, they used to pull the Turkey Red right up — we used to hide into town on the Turkey Red Special," Mrs. Gee said when interviewed in 1975 and 1976 for the county bicentennial project.

She referred to a railroad spur line with an unusual nickname that served farm families in the county's rural northern areas for about 60 years, giving them a convenient way to get themselves, crops and other agricultural items to Bozeman.

The Milwaukee Road platted the site for a town called Menard (named for early settler Teleford Menard), advertised townsites for sale, and built a branch line north from Bozeman. The line started at the Milwaukee Depot, which still stands on the east end of Main Street in Bozeman, went past Story Mill and loosely paralleled the current Springhill Road before turning west towards Dry Creek



Images courtesy of Gallatin County Historical Museum

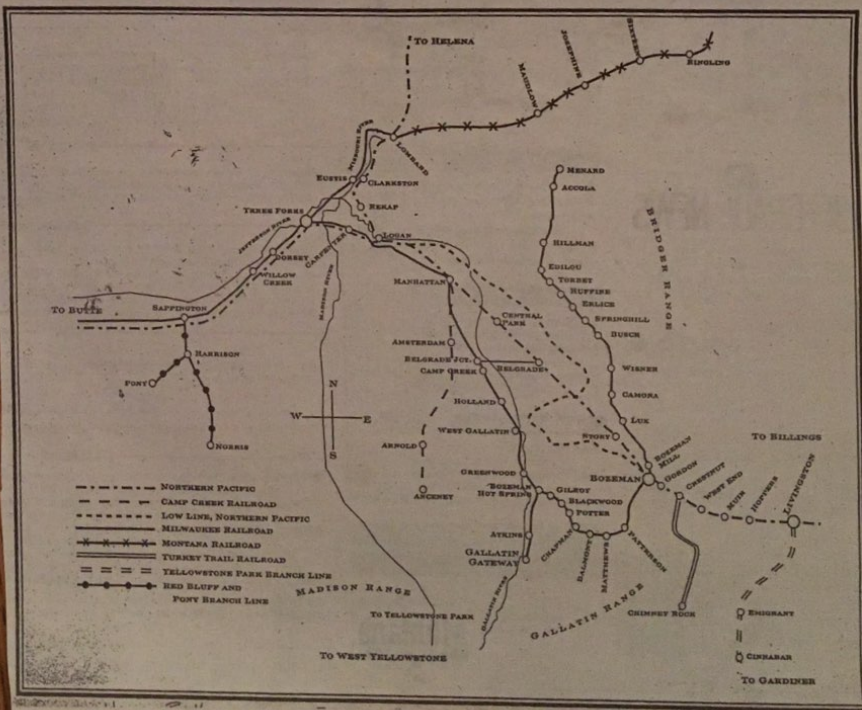
The engine of the Turkey Red is shown. The railroad spur, operated by Milwaukee Road, brought crops and people into town from the rural areas of Gallatin Valley when travel was more of an arduous event. Below is a map of railroad lines in the area including the Turkey Red.

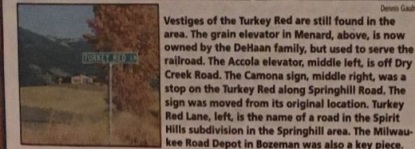
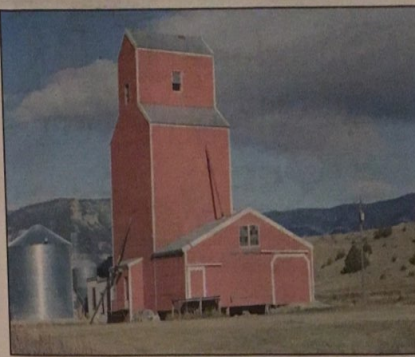
Road en route to its terminus. Menard briefly appeared like a typical Montana village, with a store, post office, blacksmith, grain elevator, dance hall, depot and baggage building.

The line has no official name on old Milwaukee route maps, but county pioneers knew it as the Turkey Red, the name of the hardy red winter wheat grown in Gallatin

The line has no official name on old

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Vestiges of the Turkey Red are still found in the area. The grain elevator in Menard, above, is now owned by the DeHaan family, but used to serve the railroad. The Accola elevator, middle left, is off Dry Creek Road. The Camona sign, middle right, was a stop on the Turkey Red along Springhill Road. The sign was moved from its original location. Turkey Red Lane, left, is the name of a road in the Spirit Hills subdivision in the Springhill area. The Milwaukee Road Depot in Bozeman was also a key piece.

## Turkey Red

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County and elsewhere in Montana.

Besides wheat, the line carried barley and oats, along with milk, eggs and cream — and occasionally passengers — into Bozeman until it was shut down in 1973. By 1980, the Milwaukee Road quit running trains in Montana.

Margaret Gee recalled catching a ride on the Turkey Red when she was in high school; she graduated in 1919 and was a teacher in Clarkston and Lincoln.

"When we went to high school, we would sometimes go on the Turkey Red Special to high school," boarding the train at the Springhill siding, she said.

Bozeman Milling Company originally built thirteen elevators spaced every couple miles along the line. Later, Lewistown-based Montana Flour Mills Company purchased and operated the elevators. Finally, in the 1960s, Con Agra purchased the elevators and then sold them to local farmers. The late Frank DeHaan purchased the Menard elevator, a still well-maintained facility that his heirs use for agricultural operations.

Most of the wheat sent to Bozeman was processed at a downtown flour mill, according to Dean Miller, 85, whose family started farming in the Menard area in 1943. Milwaukee railroad cars took some of the crop to a mill that operated in Belgrade, he recalled on Monday.

The Turkey Red never ran more than about three times a week, and by the time Miller saw it in his youth, it operated a couple times a week during wheat harvest. "The rest of the time, you'd hardly see it," he said.

The train wasn't speedy or large. "I think they probably had about three or four (cars). They had box cars with sliding doors to carry the grain, he said. The railroad built "grain doors," sections of one-inch lumber nailed together that were placed where the sliding doors opened and thus kept most of the grain inside the cars.

A belt with cups lifted grain to the top floor of the elevator, and elevator operators used a flexible spout to load about 1,500-3,000 bushels into each car stopped on the tracks, Miller said. When the wheat got to Bozeman, however, it took "a lot of shoveling" to unload the cars.

Mrs. Henry Walker rode the Turkey Red. She lived in the Walker Settlement,

a community in the Springhill Road area for more than a half century and was a teacher at the Walker School.

"When I came out here, they used their cars when they could but you couldn't always use the car," she recalled in a 1974 oral interview given to the county bicentennial committee.

Farmers hauled their wheat to the Turkey Red Line and on Saturdays in the winter time they ran a special for people out in this area (Springhill Road) and on out north to ride to town. They'd come out in the morning and pick everybody up and if you lived far enough away, you'd go down to the Turkey Red spur where you'd get on."

Mrs. Walker said her family got on at the Camona spur, along Springhill Road, several miles north of Bozeman.

"Tied up your team and rode to town on the Turkey Red and did your shopping and came back out in the evening," giving rural residents a day in town, she said.

"The roads got pretty muddy and it was hard to get through. It saved a long, cold ride in a sled."

Mrs. Walker said the wintertime alternative involved bobsleds, upon which wagon boxes were placed.

"You'd have lots of throw robes, old cattle skins, hides, things like for sitting on and keeping warm because it was pretty cold to ride that far in zero and below temperatures. They didn't go to town very often, I'm sure."

Memories of the train linger even for a Baby Boomer such as Jane Toohy Hall, whose father, Jim Toohy, farmed along Springhill Road near its intersection with the road bearing her family name. Hall, 65, said she remembers the Turkey Red going past her childhood home several times a year. One of its stops was at the Camona siding, and the sign, moved from its original location, still stands near her home.

"It had a caboose. Guys would always wave at us," she said Monday.

Others who helped or were consulted in preparing these articles include: Rachel Phillips, Research Coordinator, Gallatin Historical Society/Gallatin History Museum; Sharon DeHaan, daughter of Frank DeHaan; Mary Ellen Fitzgerald, Belgrade school trustee and retired teacher; Jim Toohy, son of Jim Toohy; and John Truesen, Director, Mennonite Historical Archives, Newton, Kansas.